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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

THE DEACONESS MOVEMENT.

WHETHER for success or failure, Deaconesses are established in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the month of May, 1888, at the General Conference of that body, held in New York, the subject of their admission was carefully discussed and was referred to the Committee on Missions, of which Bishop Thoburn was chairman.

Everywhere to-day there is a cry for help for the suffering, and to the credit of humanity, be it said, that cry is not unheeded. The question of how to help has been the question of the hour ; surely there never was one more deserving of our careful attention. The "groaning" of creation continues, notwithstanding the preaching, and the practising more or less, of Gospel precepts. We have, most of us, a favorite remedy for the ills which surround us, yet surely it is better to assist each other in this work of need than to criticise coldly the fashion of doing it.

I shall first give the regulations made by authority in the M. E. Church for the carrying out of the work of the Deaconess, but, though I give them in a condensed form, I have been careful to give the substance fully.

The first regulation defines the duties of the Deaconess. She is to care for the poor, the sick, the orphan ; she is to pray with the dying and to comfort the sorrowful, and she is to devote herself exclusively to these occupations.

The second clause is not less important. It provides for the absolute liberty of each Deaconess, who is free to resign her charge at any moment, and there is an explicit declaration that no vows shall be exacted from her.

The third regulation provides for the control of the Deaconess' work, which is governed by the Annual Conference and a board of nine members, three of whom shall be women.

Fourth. This board confers authority (license) on each Deaconess, but no one can receive a certificate who is under 25 years of age, or who has not passed two years in training.

Fifth. This rule provides that no one shall be licensed as a Deaconess except on the recommendation of the Quarterly Conference, and the continued approval of this conference is necessary for the continuance of the Deaconess in her work.

Sixth. This regulation provides for the direction of the work of the Deaconess ; when a Deaconess is working for a pastor she is under the direction of the pastor, who arranges her work. When a Deaconess is working in a Deaconess Home, she is under the direction of the superintendent of the Home.

The character and the qualifications of a person who presents herself as

a candidate for the office of Deaconess is made the subject of careful investigation by the members of the Quarterly Conference. "This body," says the Rev. Henry Wheeler, in his recent work, "Deaconesses Ancient and Modern," "consists of every officer of the local church, and is presided over by the presiding elder, who is a member of the bishop's cabinet or council. This body, following the analogy furnished by the licensing of local preachers, will inquire into the gifts, grace, and usefulness of such candidate, and the way will be rigidly barred against all who cannot furnish satisfactory evidence of a good, clear, religious experience and a pure moral life."

It would seem as if every precaution and safeguard had been adopted which wisdom could devise, and yet we have heard of difficulties in one of these institutions which show that human nature is very much what human nature always has been, but it has also proved that the women who are at the fore-front of this movement are more desirous of efficient than of numerous members.

Before entering further into the working plans as at present existing in Methodist Deaconess institutions, I may say a word of those which have been inaugurated in the Presbyterian Church. The existence of Deaconesses is also an established fact in the Presbyterian body, but, as might be expected from those who have in their midst the old Covenanter martyr spirit, they have determined to steer as clear as possible of any approach to the religious sisterhoods of Rome. The Presbyterian Deaconess wears no costume, and does not attempt community life. She lives in the world, and with her friends, and is in fact the counterpart of the Scripture reader of the English Evangelical Church, plus a dedication service. She resembles more closely the active Deaconess of the early church, of which Phebe of Cenchrea is the model and the traditional type. It will be a curious and an interesting study for the future religious humanitarian to watch the outcome of these different attempts to revive an ancient custom, which certainly has apostolic countenance.

The Methodist Deaconess has adopted a costume, not without much discussion and difference of opinion, even amongst those who are most intimately concerned. So much could be said for and against this arrangement that no doubt it was a question difficult to decide, but I could not help admiring the spirit of one of its most earnest advocates when she said: "All these arrangements may be changed at any time, and I for one will agree with the majority." It may be said that the wearing or not wearing of a certain dress matters very little, but forms are most certainly the expression of certain mental attitudes and opinion, and as such have an importance all their own. Those who had any experience of what were most appropriately called the "surplice riots" in England, some years since, would agree with our idea on this point.

The Methodist Deaconess also lives in community as a rule. Still, exceptional cases are provided for when the Deaconess, either alone or with a companion, may go anywhere to assist a pastor. But if I am rightly informed, even in this case she would live apart. I should say, however, that the Deaconess is not obliged to wear her distinctive dress when she visits her family or leaves the institution for her annual holiday. No doubt it is anticipated that the Deaconess will hold her office for life, for an especial provision is made for her comfort in sickness and for her home in later years, when she, too, will need all the care and loving attendance which she has given for so many long years to others.

Obviously she is legislated for as one apart. Yet if her personal liberty of choice or change is jealously protected, if she is not made to feel, as in the case of the Roman Catholic sister, that she forfeits the esteem, if not the religious virtue, of her character if she retires from her work, all these regulations are greatly to her advantage.

There is a difference of opinion amongst the best authorities as to the identity of widows and Deaconesses in the early church, but there is no question that there were women who were set apart for the service of the church, and that this order of voluntary and free servitors was superseded, later and gradually, by cloistered sisters, who in later ages have almost given place to the active organs of the Roman Church. St. Chrysostom spoke of his friend Olympias as "the Deaconess, most worthy and beloved of God."

Pastor Fliedner, of Kaiserswerth, has the honor of being the first to revive the ancient order of Deaconesses, though, as early as 1575, some Protestant refugees from Holland established a Deaconess work at Wesel, in Germany, but the attempt ended in failure. In 1836 statutes were drawn up for the first German Deaconess Society, through the instrumentality of Pastor Fliedner, who went through the usual vicissitudes which are the inevitable trial of every successful work. His institution has flourished marvellously, though it met at first with all kinds of opposition; it was opposed by many Protestants, because they feared, not unnaturally, that it was a step Rome-wards; it needed the test of time to show how very far this was from being true. It was opposed bitterly by Roman Catholics, although in this country they have taken the inception of Deaconess work by Protestant churches as a compliment, saying that "imitation is the highest form of flattery." In Germany, however, it was very different. Romanists compared the work of Fliedner to that of the apostate Julian, who established Pagan institutions of a charitable character, to show that Christians had not a monopoly of good works. They prophesied his speedy downfall, a prophecy in which the prophet prophesied according to his desire, which was not fulfilled. So far was it from an unfavorable result, that in 1861, when the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pastor Fliedner's Deaconess Home was celebrated, there were twenty-seven Deaconess houses founded, and to day there are fifteen hundred houses, and the Deaconesses have numbered seven thousand one hundred, and thus has the little grain of mustard seed grown up into the great and magnificent tree of success. The work of these German Deaconesses embraces every form of charity and helpfulness to suffering humanity. They have established schools, colleges, orphanages, lunatic asylums, hospitals, homes for the aged, and a "House of Evening Rest" for the aged or infirm Deaconesses. It should be noted that the Deaconesses have the control of whatever property they may have, and are perfectly free as to their testamentary disposition of the same. Nor is there any system of so-called religious obedience. Nothing is required from the Deaconess except an observance of the regulations of the Home, such as would be necessary in any public institution.

In England the Mildmay Deaconess system founded by the Rev. W. Pennefather, a Protestant clergyman of the Low Church Episcopal school, has been a marvellous success, numbering its workers by hundreds. Indeed, the success of these institutions depends absolutely on the large and Christian spirit in which they are carried out.

In this country the German Deaconess Home has not been the success which was anticipated when the costly Mary Drexel Home was established

in Philadelphia. As a general rule the erection of costly institutions does not promote the ends which are anticipated. Workers are far more needed than buildings, though of course for certain work special establishments are needed. I believe no one feels this lack of helpers more keenly than the superintendent of this institution.

The American Methodist Deaconesses have been more successful in the matter of numbers, but they also ask, Where are the helpers, for the fields are ripe for the harvest?

Mrs. Lucy Rider Meyer is the first person who gave practical shape to the Methodist Deaconess work in this country. She and her husband were the principals of the Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions, and the Deaconess work just grew out of this. The students who were training for the foreign mission were sent out two afternoons in the week to visit the sick and the poor. It was then that the immense need for constant, devoted work amongst our poorer brethren was fully realized. The work was there; as Mrs. Meyer truly said in an address at Chautauqua, "We talk of our Pilgrim Fathers, but what are we doing for our pagan brothers?"

The third annual Conference of the Deaconesses of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held at Chautauqua. The two previous conferences were held at Chicago and at Ocean Grove. If one may judge by the increase in three years the next Conference will show a very large addition to the numbers both of Deaconesses and of sympathizers. Already there are one hundred in the field, and representatives were present from every large town in the United States. Bishop Thoburn represented six Deaconesses' homes, well established in India. He invited the next Conference to meet in Calcutta, when the place of reunion was under consideration. With all the advances in modern science such a reunion may not be an impossibility in the near future.

M. F. CUSACK.

ART STUDENTS IN ITALY.

IN THE hope of being useful to those of my countrymen who purpose to establish themselves in Italy, either for the study or the practice of art, I offer, by way of suggestion, some views derived from a long residence in Italy in an official capacity, and from an intimate association with many of the most prominent American, foreign, and native painters and sculptors in Florence, Rome, Milan and Naples.

Italy has peculiar advantages for art-training generally, and especially for sculpture. In this regard Florence is second to no other city, not even Rome. The capital of Italy may excel in its galleries of antique sculpture and in the greater commerce of painters and amateurs from all parts of the world, but the student will find it much dearer in rents, labor, and the general cost of living, and it has besides the very serious drawback of insalubrity during several months of the year. Florence, on the contrary, is healthy in all seasons, far cheaper as a residence, and has the decided advantage of being near the celebrated quarries of Carrara and Ceravezza, which supply the finest statuary marble known. Indeed sculptors in America find it greatly to their interest to send their models to Italy to be put into marble or bronze on account of the large saving in the cost, as well as on account of the greater choice of material. The famous bronze foundry of the late Professor Papi